

Cryman

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Caudill College of Humanities

Morehead State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of English

by

Matthew Branham

April 18, 2000

CAMDEN CARROLL LIBRARY MOREHEAD, KY 40351

MSU Thesis
811
B821c

Accepted by the faculty of the Caudill College of Humanities, Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of English degree.

George Ekland

Director of Thesis

Master's Committee:

George Ekland, Chair
Laura Neysen
Wayne

7.18.2000
Date

Cryman

Matthew Branham, M.A.
Morehead State University, 2000

Director of Thesis: George Eklund, M.F.A.

When I was little, I was an unsoothable crybaby. I cried so often that, after a time, the people around me just stopped paying attention. My mother would get frustrated with my crying to the point of her own tears. One day when I was in a particularly foul mood, Mother walked away from me. Soon, I heard a loud knock at the front door followed by a hoarse voice that growled, "Who's that crying in here?"

"No one is crying here. Go away Cryman," said Mother's voice, small with fear. I had heard the story of the Cryman, an evil Santa Claus-like figure who stalked the earth searching for unruly, disobedient children. In my mind, the Cryman was a black-clad demon with a long tail and hooved feet like those of the devil. I knew, though I had never been exactly told, that when the Cryman found these unfortunate children, he would throw them into the great sack that he carried over his back and carry them away to a dark place where they would never see their Mommies or Daddies again. Until that day, I had never truly believed that the Cryman was real but I guess I never really doubted it either. When I heard that voice, I stopped crying immediately, thanked Mother for saving my life and never dared to cry again.

It took me many years to understand that the Cryman was only a story and that he had only been invoked so that mother could have some peace and quiet. The

background for the pieces contained within this collection is the power of such stories to shape our reactions to our feelings. The voice in section one comes from a child who believes in a world in which every boy is a prince laboring under a curse, in which good people always marry royalty and the wicked are punished with painful death at the hands of powerful fate or magic. In this framework, emotional tragedy results when it becomes evident that good princesses will not always be rescued from the clutches of the beast and that Tommy Stout will not be there to pull us from the deep wells that often exist in the place of repressed memories.

Section three is dominated by the unquestionable influence of the story of an all-powerful figure who does not care to intervene when we are in danger, but takes it upon Himself to see to it that we are punished eternally if we dare to act upon the desires of our own minds and bodies.

I believe that all lives are shaped by such stories and that the only available options are to either suffocate in the notion that we are powerless to escape the limits set by our parents, or to explode the barriers of tradition from the inside. The poems in this collection are a record of my attempts at squirming away from the vine.

Though the scene may change, each piece is driven by a voice of narrative exploration that does not know where the journey will end, a voice struggling to find its place in an adult world of ideological confusion.

Since the first of these poems was written, something has crawled deeply into the swirl of ideas that I once termed my beliefs and exploded in a rain of self-creating tears and shouts of delighted laughter. There are no conclusions here, only a

landscape of countless crossroads and interchanges, none of which makes a promise of enlightenment or of any conceivable future.

Accepted by: George Ekland, Chair

Layne Meyer

Vasilata

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	pages:
I. REDEMPTION OF LEVI-	
Forged.	2
Latchkey.	3- 4
For All of My Poor Dead Pets	5- 6
Sweet Princess Entropy.	7
Citricide.	8- 9
Mollett.	10- 11
Blacklog.	12- 16
By Inches.	17
Wonderful Memories.	18- 19
A Father's Love.	20
Reflections For Mother.	21- 22
Call No Man _____	23- 25
When Men Become Children.	26
Molting.	27
II. VINDICATION FOR SAINT MICHAEL.	28- 32
III. SAINT JOHN'S DREAM-	
The Ebb of Faith.	34- 35
Vice of Mourning.	36- 37

The Agony of Indiscretion.	38
A Sound Unseemly.	39
Manifest.	40- 41
The Collapse of Reason.	42
Invocation 36:84.	43- 44

Crybaby
Crybaby
Stick your finger in your eye.
Go home.
Tell your mother
Good-goodbye.

When the Cryman comes, dry your eyes.
When the Cryman comes, dry your eyes.
When the Cryman comes, dry your eyes,
Or tell Dad and Mommy
Goodbye.

I:

Redemption of Levi

Forged

I was awakened from amniotic dreams
By life-shattering violence.

Floating peacefully,
I became more human every day.

I fanned new hands,
Impressed with God's flawed technology.

In love with the warmth and the darkness,
I knew what it meant to be connected.

It was a shock,
As mother's face was replaced by a bald bulb.

I winced with new, staring eyes
Quickly strapped with a black mask.

It hurt.
It hurt so bad

Freezing, terrified
I unleashed my first, pitiful cries.

My first wish to die.

The last emotion
To be so freely expressed.

Latchkey

Clack

A small, silver key

Lifts a ponderous latch.

Grotesque thing

She ties it back.

Into the oppressive tapestry of

Wearied echoes

That resonate long

After their source has flown

Highly-polished surfaces

Cannot absorb even memories.

A faint scent of incense

In honeycomb cells

No place for innocence

For kittens, the well.

Hands cup the silver, Anniversary bell.

Dreading fingerprints

The consequence

Of muddy shoelaces

Toys out of their places.

Upstairs

Downstairs

The hall filled with stares.

Starched faces smile

From gilded frames

Reflecting afternoon's glare.

Bedchamber pillows cower stiffly

Stuffed hard

With gossamer screams.

Fossilized in formal tears.

Longing lily heads bow

Sighing wilderness prayers

That reverberate hand-blown vases

Dry and sprinkled

With prismatic, insect flying machines

That refract the halo of sunlight
Making showers of dust
Appear magical.

Forgotten fruit lies
Withered, fully-blackened
By the weight
Of too many pressing thumbs.

Sobbing bitter oil
Into stiff calico
Too listless
Even to notice jade flies
That seem to manifest
From the sulking shadows

“The cupboard is bare.”
She gobbles the musty air for comfort
Silently to avoid waking He who sleeps.

Needles and pins
A muffled, angelic tinkle
The cry of distant sparrows
Hoofing hobbled
Against cold, kitchen tile
The eggshell mosaic
Blackblackwhiteblackblackwhite

She has opened her solitary door
Craving more
But all other locks are too large
Or else too tight.

For All of My Poor, Dead Pets

Goldfish died of shock
Blood still room temperature
Skin as cold as
Only fish can comfortably be.
I didn't mean to.

Baby birds died, overfed
So helpless.
I didn't know
To chew the grubs
The lunch meat too much.
I didn't mean to.

Beagle puppy died
Crushed by the wheels
Of Aaron street
That distorted puppy body
I never knew
I didn't mean to.

Bunnies died
I do not know the reason
I fed them fresh clover
From my hand
Kept them warm
Maybe they died
From too much love.
I didn't mean to.

Yellow kitty died
Murdered by the gray Tom
His hip was healing fine
He pined away
On the back step crying
Chased away while I slept
I didn't know.

Yellow kitty died
Tied in a sack with
A dirty, red stone
Suffocated in a flooded trash can

I can still hear her screaming
I just did as I was told.

I cried
When the big kids
Dug her body from the base of that tree
To see her dead and bulging
Blue eyes
I could not help her.

Blue parakeet died
When Daddy let him out of his cage
To fly
Batted him about with a white tee shirt.
He smacked hard against the wall
Neck broken
I could only cry.

The hamster died.
I do not know the reason.
I found his stiff body
Safe in his cedar bed
And screamed each time
He would not go down
The toiled drain.
I didn't mean to.

The hermit crab died
Crawled from his shell one night
I found him dried to a husk
In a beam of morning sun
I slept right through.

Sweet Princess Entropy

Prone lying
Flailing table salt angels
On the rough hewn planks
Of an unlevel floor

Catching splinters
In a shaven scalp
Fine-grain slits
cut to the quick.

God,
let me sift
between the bricks.
A crumbling tower
Without doors.
Window open
tresses shorn.

I've eaten my fill.
Father hogs the looking glass.
The chirping rainbow's broken body
lies strewn across the fields of Kansas.

Please mother,
No more fairy tales.
Leave me to my dreams
while your wedding band
so easily cast away
grows green
in the kitchen grease trap.

Citricide

*Didn't a name like an orange
Creep into your heart?*

-P. Neruda

So sweet
Your sunny core
Pure
Innocent
Wholesome

Your hard rind
So impenetrable
A mass of bitterness
But with just the right push
The walls peel away completely.

Thick, yellow nails
Pull roughly apart
Your embryonic society
Lashing tongue
Sucks your sweet pulp
Cuts through your inner skin
Losing all sense
Til it loses all desirability.

Discard those tough, white seeds
That lie
Protruding beneath your navel mound
Abort
With shearing incisors
Catapult them orally
Along with their promises of life
Into the dusty corners
Of genocidal oblivion

Throw away your scooped-out skin
Proving again
That purity
Is but an invitation
To soil
That innocence

Is but an invitation
To exploit
That wholeness
Is but an invitation
To devour.

Mollett

the barn
the smell of axle grease
the piss of bullied cows

chickens roost high
gorged fat on chop
roosters with their pink, featherless heads
see nothing

we enter
under the guise of friendship
clinging
you are older

you have the finest ideas
slaughtering horse weeds
like fat sheep

the black bulge in your cheek
grasshopper drool
I will not take

your thick lenses
distort innocence
eyes cross
you cannot touch
with hands black with mud
I will not let you

we are alone here
you are older
the soft, pink bulge
of which you are so curious
corduroy legs cross
I will not let you

I hear a horn blow

you will not let me leave
you hold me down
you punch too hard

to be playing
you are in control
you are stronger

I hear the horn blow

a clay pot, a Lego sculpture
gifts to your mother
oblivious

I hear the horn blow

my hands curl into fists
I leap onto your bowing shoulders
batter your raptor head
until you start to cry
this is rage

I hear the horn blow

you are stronger
I run into the dark evening
leaving my shoes behind
the grass is wet with dew
my toes get colder

I hear the horn blow

I cannot stop
I hear your curses
your heavy boots
pounding the earth behind me
you are older

I hear the horn blow

I must keep running
until I stand safely
behind Mother's headlights

Blacklog

The dog died
Spread your hands wide.
Show off the creek bank muck
Hanging in alphabet creases
Bold, the name of a future love.

Stomp the walnuts
Still green to explode
Hand grenades
Yellow and bile inside
The core deep brown
From worn flip flops unbreakable.

There is no meat inside
For black fudge or cookies
Steaming on the wire rack.

All he said was
"The dog died."
Take this leaf
A green heart
Envious of our chaotic play
Freedom makes him shrivel

Horse weeds brown
Veined like a celery stalk
Brown cork inside
Battle axe roots
British walking canes.

Crush the leaf
He will not break
Rubber can easily bend
He smells so clean
The dog pee'd.

Don't eat the yellow flowers
Those weeds are not clover.
Those weeds are candy.
The strawberries are too small
Not strawberries at all

So white inside
Tiny, crimson seeds
No flavor
But burst with a watery juice
Beware the red spider.

Touch me nots curling
Popping as the challenge is answered
Spring loaded, spreading seeds
Bursting like bottle rocket fire.

Horny flowers
Horny trees
The one with the great red flowers
Died when Daddy cut her spouse down
His passion was bleaching the cedar siding
She mourned his death and brought forth
No more flowers
Barren.
Oh, true love.

The red buds are sticky
Smell so sweet.
Honey suckle not worth her leaves
Someone needs a lynching
Bumblebees trapped inside for days
Unwary suitors
Who find freedom when we bring
Our faces near.

Crawdads so soft and white.
Do not catch them by their backs
So easily crushed in grasping hands.
There was one mossy rock
That we could not move.

Martin County
Starving for excitement
But each summer day
Held so many forbidden promises.

She was a stranger
The tiny trophy tossed into the rushing water

When it flooded its banks in the summer time
The year we walked for miles
When it froze over.

Beware the white ice
That crashes through with the slightest touch
Of a thick, winter shoe

Do not touch me
Blankets are for us.
Pickles
Aliens
Star Wars
Stolen

Paste gems so prized
Yard sale, costume jewels
The gold-plated locket
With the broken hinge
With no pictures inside.
The rings are tight
But each is adjustable
to the perfect oval

This is a shirt for the dead
Baby blue and smooth
So elegant

Black chain
Smell like skunkers

A plastic boy named Charlie
Red and white plaid shirt
On a body made for tails
Country boy with his thin depressions
The monicle long ago lost
The little head sunk deep in the flood

We brewed secret poisons
From sour grass
Pale brown, black widow spiders
So venomous
Poured on the grass

To watch it die.
Beware the red waspers
Beware the yellow hornet

Yellow flowers so easily stripped
To make whips
Like our small bodies shared in dark places

I wanted my own machete
I wanted my own BB gun
Pumped twenty times to shoot through skin
A pellet gun
Pointed silver tips
To kill the werecreatures.

He-man
Jazzercise
Eric
Rolled mats
A rolling cart
Plywood ramp for the movement
Of wheeled mop buckets
Grey water.

Satin bedspread stain
Birds of paradise flying
Matching wallpaper razor slashed
I loved to cut
I loved to burn.

I lost so many good G.I. Joes.
So many good friends to blame
KevinKevinKevinKevin
RobbieRobbieRobbieRobbie
AdamAdamAdamAdam.

Cold quilts
A shadow play
Tight squeeze
Cool breeze
"Come to me soapy suds"

Bag of nits

Too young
Good egg trapped in the hamper
Trampoline handspring
Plastic wrap

"I'm on the phone!"
Leave me alone!
Stupid
Idiot
Get out
Get out
Close the door.
Get out and close the door!
Get up
Get up
Get up
Get out of bed
Get out of bed
Cold showers
A pillow stench

"Your sister is a crab."
"She's got legs up to her ass!"
"You're *whose* brother?"

Blue Guess Jeans
Bronze zippers to the knee
White socks
Rolled twice
A new pair of white Keds
With every trip to the mall

Collared silk blouses
Sewn in shoulder pads
Padded bras
Revolving in front of our
Once puppet show mirror
Making sure that you are bloused evenly around.

Cover stick
Matt(e) foundation
Eyeliner
Mascara

Mascara faces
Eyes wide, rimmed in black
Eyelash curling machine
Mouth wide, lip gloss shining.
Hair high on top,
Dried upside down.
Curling iron
Crimping iron
Curling brush
Diffuser
Blow dryer
Aqua Net
Infusium 23

Putting on the dog.
By Inches

Thick brass zippers scream
Shirt tails break the sound barrier
Mother is home
And she is engaged.

Cobwebs whimper
In high corners
Praying that they will not be seen.

Loitering shoes scooped
Into cedar-scented closets
Throw rug fringe worried into formation

She sweeps all the dust away
So we all hover bodiless
Nothing to cower into

There is no time
We must lift our feet
For Mother kills by inches.

Wonderful Memories
(from words found on pictures)

"Such a small space."
"Wonderful memories to cling to"
[Dogwood church house]
Wilted petals weep
Long before the upsweep
Unheeded

Perfectly happy before the children.
I'm sorry.
"Sugar for my sugar."
Green-eyed monster.

"Wonderful memories"
"It's all your fault."
"I'm sorry, Mommy."
I didn't mean to make you cry."

Malformed.
Jaundiced.
"Little Preacher Man"
"Don't laugh."
I know I'm fat."

"Pride and Joy"
"The girls took this one
Just for you."
"I had a 5X7 made."
"I'll take them away."
Wonderful memories.

What if he had lived?
The poet?
The pacifist?
Brain splattered
Playground concrete.

"Daddy, please come home."
"I'll take them away."
Wonderful memories.

[Dogwood church house]
Wilted petals weep
Long before the upsweep.

I'm sorry.
"Forget the boy."
"The most wonderful guy."
"I'll slap your jaws."
All over the wall.
It's all my fault.
"Don't laugh.
I know I'm fat."

Little preacher man.
I'm sorry.
"This is just me."
"Forget the one who cried."

"I'm sorry,
I didn't mean to make you cry."
"Such a small space."

"I'll take them away."
Wonderful memories
To cling to.
It's all my fault.
"Don't laugh.
I know I'm fat."

A Father's Love

I remember you there in that darkened hallway,
Hem-touching hands
Clutched in white-knuckled fists
Around my chubby throat
Daring me to speak
Even to breathe.

The child holds the struggling puppy down into the black water, feeling power. . .

I remember your face
Hot lantern hanging above
the protective robes of a saint

Florescent bathroom vanity
Shines white on razor creases
Of an immaculate gray three-piece suit.
Golden cross, the shield of God's righteousness
Standing beneath those bulging, blue, lobster eyes.

I never hurt you. I swear to God I never hurt you.

I remember the blood
Pressed crimson against your veined jaws,
Breathing in exhaled gasps
Dripping bitter sweat
As you delivered to me
Your sermon of fatherly love,

Charging me with sins I could not bear.
Deftly weaving a stiff mail of silence
A stomach slashed to toxic ribbons
From swallowing too many bitter shards
Of Daddy's shattered image.

I'm sorry. I love you. Please tell me you love me.

Reflections For Mother

The raindrops
pool into murky reflections
the surface broken
before it may reflect
the subtleties of the darkness

A mirrored ball shattered
the black cat mud-splattered
cries for her lost children

a fractured call
of love mixed with sadness
adoration mingled with confusion

They follow closely behind love
crescent claws retracted
so as not to wound them

Sitting closely by her side
waterproof and waddling
fuzzy bellies slick with oil
glide effortlessly
fluids exchanged with affection
gentle ripples change them
from ducklings to dreams.

I feel a soft presence
in the palm of my left hand
a weary droplet resting.

Staring into the bowed bosom
of one so ancient
I do not believe
that I contain it
for it contains me

My own reflection
so small and twisted
nestled deep inside
Disturbed only by
a cold wind quickening

A fear of flight
With a sigh,
I say a prayer for Mother
And all that she has suffered
In changing me
from a duckling to a dream

Call No Man _____

*Father, father where are you going?
O do not walk so fast.
Speak, Father. Speak to your little boy
Or else I shall be lost.*

-Blake

I.

Your God
Was never big enough
For the both of us

But your rage lit the world
Reflected in other well-meaning faces
A smear, a pearl

Like the sooty blots that lay sprinkled
Like dirty stains throughout the family album
The me that I accepted

Concealed beneath my perspiring folds
For the sake of the cut
I would take it all down

He, the masochist who found comfort
In insecure feelings
Always, "I'm sorry."

Always, "I didn't mean to."
Always, "It's all my fault."
I never tired of suffering

For your sin
The punishment for blasphemy
The light of your face turned from me

That angry star had become so familiar
Your threats, hard hands on me
Brought that sick throb inside

The thrill of being ruled by fear
That made me properly afraid

Each time I "stepped over the line"

I needed it. Come on. Give it.
I wanted to see how easily
The beast could be revealed

I pushed. I gouged, and found that
My very development was an offense to you
You had to keep me in my place.

I understand and thank you..
"Daddy I love you,"
Those words you always forced from me.

At the end of the exercise
That false little "amen" that told you
That you were blameless.

I learned the lesson
To trust the safety of dark corners

II.

One day I looked back
And could no longer see
Your footprints in the snow.

I cried for a while
The tears of a rugged plaything
That had outlived its novelty

Until the sounds there
Reached out to comfort me.
Like the moment when He pulled back

The swaddling robes of chaos
I stretched forth my hands
Felt the ragged edges of what you left behind

Pulled them round my shameful nakedness
And for the first time, I felt safe.
As I crawled about the walls of this new place

I scraped black sludge from the beautiful colors
Cleaned the dust away
To discover red, green, a heavenly blue

A heavenly blur of voices and contented laughter
All calling me to come and play
To linger in their midst

I cleansed myself in the rivers of their sound
The flood of harmonious singing
Instruments struck with demonic passion

I painted my own sunsets
Built temples of words
And carved the sweet faces of my very own saints

All those ghosts that you called most evil
Were easily the most Beautiful
I touched up their grins, made their chins more prominent.

I gave them childish names
Ran my fingers through their tangled hair
Set their places at my table

Filled them with the healing tea of a trust
Of which you were never worthy.
I placed them on a stage hung richly in rhyme

Pulled the dead leaves from their circlets,
Dressed them in robes of green velvet and called
them "brothers."

I've ceased to call you "Father," father.
For that is the name I have chosen for myself
You are merely a conquered shadow

The stomping, yellow demon
Defanged
Defeated

Whining for a word of forgiveness
A moment of attention
Or a simple glimpse from jewel-crying eyes.

When Men Become Children

When men become children
Spread hands receive red, swelling faces
Creating flayed masks to maintain manhood

Shoulders heave rhythmically
And poets become babes
Snatching broken words of forgiveness

Between sobs of regret
For the things long ago done
Those better left unremembered

Those hugs and kisses denied
To uphold a father's dignity
His place at the head of the table

When men become children
The hard surfaces dissolve
The harsh angles drip away

Leaving faces moist and chubby
The heart's iron bands snap
Leaving grooves that cannot be changed

Only, "I am hurting."
"I wish I had taken time out to feel,
time out to know the beauty of

interrupted silence."
But the feeling cannot stay.
And a real man does not weep

When he hears those echoing words
"Look, Father, see.
Come see what I have made."

Molting

Reclining upon a pedestal of flame
Pondering questions
Of silence and illiterature,

My mind buzzes
As the tiny oscillating fan
Struggles to change
An inferno to a flicker.

Lying
Stripped to the waist and trembling
My own false faces
Stare back like the dried scabs

Of wounds long ago healed
But still transmitting
Their phantom ache

The suffering angel
The starving wolf
The axe-wielding psychotic

Stapled to crumpled black-paper walls
Edges curled in a dubious sneer
Showing the new pink beneath

They look at me
Soft, pale torso
A scar-tissue patchwork
Stitched together over two decades

I feel those faces breaking down
But tire of mending them
The room has grown small
But I see that the door
Stands yawning open.

II:

Vindication for

Saint Michael

Vindication For Saint Michael

I. *There is not a stalk on earth that has not its angel in heaven.*

Eastern son
Seduced by spirits of the West
Oppressed by those who would protect

Betrayed by the womb that bore
Red dragon umbilical
Crucified
By that connection that failed to feed

Born lynched, my sweet brother
The blue bonds crushed out
The tongue of flame

Like sunlight struggling
Within the grasp of
Overbearing kudzu and evergreen

Birthright
The family damage creeping in
The inability to easily accept
Received interpretations

A process of positive breaking
So that once delicate wings
Unable to escape

The embrace of tradition
Become a network of scar tissue
Stretched tight over a frame
Of twisted, junkyard steel

Feather down stubbled
That they might be coddled

Their shine must be dulled
Unbidden songs choked out
To prevent the fitful slumber of
Those who sleep grasping the scourge

A testament of love
Used to chastise into submission
Or to kill by the globe
When the pretty plaything
Fails to sing beauty upon command

Screaming bloody hell
"Do your tricks.
Make me smile.
I keep you so well."

To exist for amusement and novelty
Is the lot of the beautiful
Only to be cast aside once the colors fade
They do not wish to see the drab
Or to hear those sorrowful songs

Inspiration cramped into madness
A grim cloister lined in pulp paper spines

Blood from ancient hearts
Rotting on low shelves
Transmissions howling past
The singed nerves that scream.

II. For one long-stemmed rose, so many others, judged inferior, must be clipped to the stem.

I labor beneath one image of you
Like the moment
When the dreamer meets the dream
A scene now
To be holy misinterpreted:

We among blue, gas-line connections
Fearing you then,
brutecemeterysulkoaktreebackpropthrashsmokinggrass
Words I hadn't grown to understand.

It has taken me long
To return to that place
I, the one judged fit for heaven,

Hear them now, Michael

Chanting freedom in their soft, silent rhyme
Like on that night when
You followed the call

Only to find
That you were root bound
That the directions had
Long been soothed away

The function of the key forgotten
With the trick of memory
Organ of flight malformed
Lobotomized
Velveted horns smashed bloody
In the conflict of crushing space.

[Judgements multiply like flies]

Those God-damaged faithful
Stood accusing
Could not be denied

Back pats left incurable bruises
As they strapped you with
The easy mask of insanity

"This we do to save you."
You had no option but surrender
To weep a race of enlightened image
As they used your words against you

III. *My name is Great and Wonderful.*

Prophets lie nameless in asylum beds
Bloated with the breath of self-creation
And laughing into the downcast face of the Father

Hands, cigarette burn stigmatic
Flap lashed to bedposts
To prevent the evils of self pollution

While saint-staring eyes
Blinded from a vision of truth
Smile with exultant rapture

For they alone know that they
Have solved the great equation
Found that missing piece
Whose absence strips the picture of meaning

Idiot hands stretch transatlantic
Murmuring a question,
"Who is like God?"

Stabbing a crooked thumb
Into a sunken, asthmatic chest
Muttering, "savior"

But leaving no directions
For those brave enough to follow

III:

Saint John's Dream

The Ebb of Faith

Power once dripped from honeyed tongues
And echoed from high pulpits
Creating a light that drove the shadows
Far into their corners

A voice of mountain prophecy
Once drove hard
Into wet, clay hearts
Bitter bellies sweet with summer perspiration
Untasted

Men once stood clothed in the sun
Full of eyes within
Exhaling truth from nostrils
Of brimstone and jacinth

Now you perch
Camping in my blind spot
Swallowing candy volumes of wisdom
To be regurgitated into the mouths of the hopeless
Those who crane their ruddy necks
Like so many hatchling sparrows
To receive

Pressing hard in soft spots
Curves filling hollows
Only to suffocate
To feed your lust for devotion

Driven to the close of creation
By those tired of trying to untangle
Resorting to the snips and what
"And what shall we do for a sun?"

Those lambs unbeheld
Twist the knife in the heart of God
And crush trucker speed into fine lines
Connections scattered
By one sigh of defeat in a chorus
Falling from that pulpit now standing empty

Another shunned responsibility
Leads to the fall of our neglected children

That sigh expelled
Taken for gospel
Pondered for years
As your dependant ones
Learn to hate you as a means of emotional survival.

You cannot retrieve something
Once elastic
Stretched too thin, snapped
The desired ends snaking further into the distance

Vice of Mourning

One more thick gulp
Of black coffee
To pull my wet left foot
From the grave

Collapsed at the gates of consciousness
I choose my torments carefully
Dropped hot from a dirty finger
To a swollen tongue on a winter morning

With the first dark anointment
Priest's oil for the treatment of dreams
Rockets through the great, hopeless gulf
Embraced and

Urged downward by helpless spasm
Welcomely painful in the
Iron maiden bosom of Abraham
Shear away the amber obstruction to everyday vision

Two blistered hands enfold tightly
Drawing warmth that is overcome just below the surface
Draped like the glacial wings of a concrete angel
Around this now cracked and unhandled grail

Once sought for its resurrective power
Now struggling to sustain
A solitary clutch of enameled wild flowers
Those given over for passionless favor

Fragile vessel too often pestled, revived
Manipulated into gross forms to conform to fashion
A sad imitation of powder blue violets on white stone
Dabbed over the pale crust to inspire nostalgia

Hard candy glaze chipped away
Revealing the texture of
Unmarrowed bone sucked flute hollow
Unable to feed the lifelust of

Another heedless generation

Sick of those broken covenants
Now wedged within the viscera of
Two treacherously grasping stumps

Self pollutant drawn to a voiceless facial sore
Nicotine heart pumping crudely through
This dead timber mimicking art
A dull-toned instrument

Not fire-hardened but disheartened
In the surge of seven hells
Slipped from trembling hands
Golden ointment sipped by lips

Of one who once proclaimed
Faith from the mountains
So recently uncrowned
Grave robes stripped clean

The easy response to
The charm of waking
In an explosive clatter to
Sunlit temple floor of the real.

The Agony of Indiscretion

Heads drop like hairy stars
Shocked from their contemplation of heaven
By the force of unseen consequence

Carousel axis shattered
By too many centuries of revolution
Contentment masked corpses

Striking the poses
To make the right reflections
On the eyes that stand goggling.

A field of stares
Ascending to nowhere
Faces that peer back
From the cold surface of creation machines

Twisted in curves
To mimic the shape of the outmoded female body
Simpering dangers denounce
The limits of experience

I stride in
Before the flesh cools
And write my name in dust

Stroke stroke moan
In a sweet somber tone
Alice is choking and cold to the bones.

A Sound Unseemly

Ten billion cries
Chorus entwining harmonies
Mingle into one
Deafening torrent of vibration.

A great sonorous wave
Forever flowing.

The sounds of the story
The voice of one solitary angel
That holds the answers to our every question

Standing beneath a boiling Niagara of words,
We are terrified, too over-awed
To flinch, or even to move

We stand fearful of losing one beautiful syllable
From this ocean of utterance
That begat all of creation.

Salt tears rise to carry away the grains
Left behind
The residue of the last
Erroneous interpretation
Of those fragmented pages

All that we have prayed for
Desperate wishes granted
If we can only bear the pain
Of knowing.

Manifest

They're planting their flags beyond the stars
Another attempt at colonizing heaven.

They need the satisfaction
Of seeing another race in bondage.

Once-white wings
Stained to remind them of their unquestionable superiority.

They have no souls
Bloodied, crying seraph faces
Are trod beneath the feet of men

They're spreading their gospel
To another civilization of savages.

Their favorite variety of suffering
Meted out by the hands of
Those blue-eyed saviors.

They feel the thrill of discovery
As they claim the right of conquest

Thick gray cowls of dozer smoke
Mask their shameless pride

As they try with care to copy exactly
This tuneful new dialect

For the latest line
Of best-selling ethnic novels

Gold streets, jasper walls, gates of pearl
Salvaged.

The charming, white throne
Of that pompous leader who dares to call himself holy

Is melted down
To make special commemorative rings

Thorny, souvenir crowns
cast directly from the original.

The landscape fills with colored banners
Bronze statues of Man's creation

Hearts swell with pride
As the harps play rock and roll

And the leader is proud to announce
Another victory for America.

The Collapse of Reason

I was dreaming of Popsicle snow
When I saw the last star fall
The world's final fireworks display
In honor of the day of my birth.

Sparks piled in searing drifts
Burning in winter like chaos tranquility
As the people cried out "disaster"
And wrung their hands in disbelief

I was unmoved.

White hot orbit like angels
Snowflakes sharp like Chinese stars
Too late to classify
When organization is crumbling.

The prophecy has been fulfilled
Salvation was neither a lie
Nor a justification for suffering
We all the enlightened church of Darwin

Stand with mouths wide
The first time found without words to describe
Without reason or logic, evidence indisputable
Choose not to believe in the watcher

Who holds his flaming blade
To your unsunned flesh.
Deny the existence of a god
Who tramples your bones
To a paste of blood and dust

Orders the execution of your order
And the destruction of your mindless philosophy
"I told you to be as children
Now your children are as wolves

I knew you not."

Invocation 36:84
creation [take one]

Face down
Bound by angel bands
Heavens stretch tight

A dental dam
Underbelly worn wet
Licked slick
Thunders utter their voices
Dense delusional
Losing sense

Thick liquid heat
Circulates in thin bubbles of stone.
Intimate rapture
Diaphramatic moans

Upthrust hands ache
Flex like elastic mudcracks
Mock the threat of rain.
Howl deep defiant.

I dare exhale thunderhead vapor
Call down the wrath of the mountain
Arid flesh brace taut
Against the covenant flood

The seal stripped away
Coral tongue taste
Pastry sweet disaster

Transcend ecstatic
Scintillating screams flash hard
Against the shifting contours
Of the corporeal sky.

Heat lightning tickle
Flame-tempered
But scarred by holy fire

Crouch knees crack

Teeth bared and bared down
Tier straining effort.
Thunder through pale valleys

Muscular arch
Sensation starved
The auditorium
Hung with moist tissue
The great white's rows

I've captured bliss
In fleshy pockets
Sealed my own sky of
Wishing stars
Unmindful

Layered
Tender folds choke
Virginal bud
Laced
White prison
Labored exhale
A kittenish whisper